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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000205

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PASS USAID, OFDA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2015

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [CE](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: GAINING BROAD CONSENSUS ON A TIMETABLE FOR THE
WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. MILITARY ASSETS FROM THE
TSUNAMI-AFFECTED REGION: SRI LANKA/MALDIVES

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REF: (A) STATE 14650 (B) COLOMBO 0165

Classified By: CDA JAMES F. ENTWISTLE FOR REASONS 1.4 (D).

11. (C) We appreciate the opportunity to clarify the situation regarding the withdrawal of the Combined Support Group - Sri Lanka (CSG-SL) which, as noted in reftels, will occur around the end of January. As we noted in Ref B, the CSG-SL performance in both Sri Lanka and Maldives has been superb and has been greatly appreciated by the affected local populations. The coordination suggested in Para 6 of Ref A has already taken place as part of a continuous consultation process with all "tsunami players." The Ambassador and other USG officials have had detailed discussions with both the Sri Lankan and Maldivian governments. We have also talked to relevant international agencies, etc. All understand that the military component of the U.S. tsunami effort is getting ready to leave and have no problems with that. There are no outstanding issues that should delay CSG withdrawal.

12. (C) Our consistent message has been that the U.S. commitment to tsunami recovery will continue to grow and adapt. The phasing out of the U.S. military involvement in the immediate relief effort reflects a shift in focus from relief to reconstruction, not an end to U.S. involvement. In other words, the nature of U.S. post-tsunami assistance is changing (just as the nature of the

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need is changing) but U.S. engagement remains stronger than ever.

13. (C) Thus, as we have worked out with the CSG and will review again with LTG Blackman at the end of the week, it is time for the CSG activity to end. In that regard, the mid-February proposed closure of CSG operations at Utapao will pose no difficulty for us. It is important to note, however, the U.S. military ties to both Sri Lanka and Maldives were in operation long before the tsunami and will remain long after. Therefore, if in the future it becomes clear that there might be a useful role for the U.S. military in the tsunami reconstruction process in either Sri Lanka or Maldives, we will work that request through our (superb) defense attache' office here which will liaise with PACOM and other relevant DOD entities as appropriate. In short, the withdrawal of the CSG does not necessarily mean that the U.S. military will never again help out with tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

14. (C) Regarding para eight Ref A, we agree that the public diplomacy angle of CSG withdrawal is crucial and needs to be pro-active. To that end, we decided several days ago to hold a press conference on Saturday, January 29 here in Colombo to review the overall U.S. tsunami recovery package to Sri Lanka and make clear that CSG withdrawal is a change in focus, not a diminution of U.S. commitment. It is vital that the press conference occur before the bulk of the CSG leaves, in order to forestall the inevitable rumor-mongering when word of the withdrawal starts making the rounds. Thus, while we of course welcome the press guidance promised in para eight Ref A, we believe it is essential that we go ahead as planned on Saturday if our message here is to be timely and effective.

ENTWISTLE